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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [IV](#)

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON THE IDENTIFICATION/VOTER REGISTRATION
PROCESS; POLITICAL LANDSCAPE MAY BE SHIFTING

REF: A. ABIDJAN 281

[B](#). ABIDJAN 247

[C](#). ABIDJAN 175

Classified By: PolEcon Chief Silvia Eiriz for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

[1](#). (SBU) Summary. The "catch up" identification/voter registration process has been extended once again. It will end in Abidjan on May 10, but has not even begun in other areas of the country. The Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) will set up approximately 1500 registration centers nationwide, including the 227 centers that never opened for business during the initial phase of the process. The catch-up operation will be concentrated in departments where 50 percent or less of the target population has been enrolled; most of the centers will be in the west of the country. While ethnicities are traditionally affiliated with specific regions of the country and political parties, economic migration and displacements caused by the 2002 rebellion have likely shifted the country's political landscape. End Summary.

Identification/Voter Registration Extended Again

[2](#). (U) As of March 31, 6,007,116 persons had gone through the identification process, 69 percent of the target population of 8,663,149. The extension of the identification/voter registration process, scheduled to begin on April 15 and end on April 30 (See Reftel B), was delayed due to agents' strikes for non-payment of their salaries by the government. As a result, the process has been extended until May 10 in Abidjan, where forty enrollment centers are operational to carry out this final phase of the process. Throughout the rest of the country, 1500 enrollment centers will be established to carry out this "catch up" phase. Each center will be operational for fifteen days but not all centers will begin work on the same day. This patchwork approach is similar to the way the government carried out the "audience foraines" process. (The audiences foraines issued birth documents - needed to register to vote - to those whose births were never registered.)

[3](#). (SBU) The CEI initially identified 205 centers that had never opened out of the total 11,000 centers set up nationwide, but increased the number of unopened centers to 227 after consultation with the political parties. The CEI cited transportation difficulties as the major impediment to the opening of these centers. According to the CEI, the highest numbers of unopened centers are located in the traditional "hot spots" of the country. These include the regions of Bas Sassandra in the west where there are 98 (85 of them in the department/commune of Soubre); Sud Bandama in the center-south where there are 82 (all them in the department/commune of Divo), Haut-Sassandra in the west where there are 14 (7 of them in the department/commune of Daloa) and Moyen Cavally in the west with 13 (all of them in the department/commune of Guiglo). According to a document from the Prime Minister's Office, the 205 centers initially identified as never having become operational cover 64,086 voters. According to the same document, the unopened centers in Divo account for 20,712 voters and those in Soubre for 16,507 voters. All of these unopened centers will become operational during the catch-up phase.

¶4. (U) In departments where 50 percent or less of the target population has been enrolled, the CEI will re-open 20 percent of the total number of centers in the department. There are 12 such departments - 7 in the west (Bangolo, Biankouma, Blolequin, Danane, Kouibly, Man, Toulepleu), 1 in the center-west (Vavoua), 1 in the northwest (Touba), 1 in the center (Beoumi), 2 in the northeast (Bondoukou and Bouna). In departments where 50 to 85 percent of the target population has already been enrolled, 10 percent of the centers will re-open. This group represents the majority of the country with 52 departments located in both the north and the south. In departments where over 85 percent of the target population has already been enrolled, 5 percent of the centers will re-open. These departments are Abidjan, Grand Bassam, Sikensi, Zouan-Hounien, and Akoupe.

¶5. (U) The reconstitution of civil registries is ongoing. This process will allow persons whose births were registered (thus ineligible to participate in the audiences foraines process) but who do not have birth certificates to obtain them. As of May 4, 187,271 requests had been received and 90,290 (48.2 percent) had been examined. Of those examined, 80,451 were accepted and 9,839 rejected.

The Link Between Geography and Politics

¶6. (C) The official explanation for the fact that the largest number of unopened voter registration centers are located in Divo and Soubre is a lack of electric generators, not just the transportation issue. However, some would question whether there might be a political motivation. Tensions between the FPI and RDR during the audiences foraines process in 2006 erupted into such violence in Divo that the process was halted nationwide. The indigenous population of both areas is Krou - the FPI's traditional ethnic base. But, both Divo and Soubre are agricultural areas where migrants from the north (who tend to be RDR supporters) as well as immigrants from neighboring countries have moved in to work in the cocoa and coffee sectors. These migrants are often viewed by residents as "foreigners" and their eligibility to register to vote remains a potential source of tension. Also, the FPI may be unwilling to lose political control over areas that they view as theirs. Allowing large numbers of migrant workers belonging to ethnic groups other than the Krou to register to vote would likely benefit the opposition, not the FPI.

The Ethnic Vote

¶7. (SBU) Political analysts speculate whether ethnicity will determine the outcome of the next election. Although the Constitution prohibits political parties based on ethnicity, the three major political parties have an ethnic base. Some argue that inter-marriage and migration from rural to urban areas have weakened the link between political parties and ethnic groups. It is frequently said that if Ivoirians vote along ethnic lines, President Gbagbo cannot win an election. (Note: The results of the 2000 election were violently contested, but Gbagbo was eventually declared President with 59.36 percent of the vote. Opposition leaders Bedie and Ouattara were not candidates in 2000.) Gbagbo's FPI draws its grass roots support from the Krou ethnic group, which represents only 11 percent of the national population. The Akan ethnic group, with 42 percent of the population, is perceived to support the PDCI. The Northern Mande group, which makes up 17 percent of the population and the Voltaic group, which makes up 18 percent of the population, are viewed as backers of the RDR. The Southern Mande which make up 10 percent of the population, are affiliated with the UDPCI of the late General Guei, who carried out the 1999 coup d'etat. Two percent of the population is identified as other in the 1998 census results.

¶8. (U) While ethnic groups are associated with regions of the country, these lines have blurred as a result of migration

as well as displacements caused by the 2002 rebellion. According to the Ministry of Planning, the country's largest populations centers are located in Abidjan in the southeast (traditionally Akan), Korhogo in the north (traditionally Voltaic), Bouake in the central-north (traditionally Akan) and Daloa in the west (traditionally Krou).

19. (C) Comment: Several months ago, some analysts predicted that the political leadership would allow the identification/voter registration process to proceed beyond a fixed date until a critical mass of voters - 6 to 7 million - had been registered (the 2000 electoral list contains 5,475,143 voters). Although the identification process has already reached 6 million, with the majority of unopened and underperforming centers located in the west, the FPI's natural base, President Gbagbo has already informed the Ambassador that he does not intend to halt the process now (Reftel A).

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